CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: **Report Back, Theme 5**

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Purpose

The Board agreed the Authority's Corporate Plan for 2005 to 2008 at its February meeting. The Corporate Plan was framed around 5 themes, setting the overarching framework for the Authority's plans over the next three years. The fifth of those themes is:

> "to be an open, innovative and professional organisation that engages effectively with the public and behaves with integrity".

The purpose of this paper, which is the first in a series looking at each of the themes in the Corporate Plan, is to inform the Board of work which has been undertaken in the last year on this theme and to look forward and explore the key activities to be undertaken in the coming years.

Report Back, Theme 5

Background

1.   This theme relates both to the internal workings of the organisation and its relations with the general public. In the first corporate plan, the objective was phrased as 'to be an enabling organisation that is trusted and respected'. The revised wording of theme reflects the outcome of work since them to identity and specify our core organisational values. These are as follows:

   a) Integrity
   Honest, trustworthy, fair, reliable, consistent, clarity of vision, good leadership, prudent.

   b) Open & inclusive
   Transparent, clear, approachable, accessible, accountable, responsive, listening, user-friendly, public-focused, fun to work for and with.

   c) Innovative
   Dynamic, bold, willing to take risks, supportive and trusting atmosphere, learning from mistakes, embracing new technology, high environmental standards.

   d) Professional
   Committed, competent, knowledgeable, responsible, efficient, getting things done.

2.   Everyone in the organisation - staff and board - is responsible for ensuring that we live up to these values. However, specific work to deliver this theme is largely the responsibility of two Groups with an organisation wide responsibility - Communications and Corporate Services. This paper therefore primarily focuses on the work programme being taken forward by these two groups.

3.   Much of this work falls within the remit of the Board's standing committees, covering Finance, Staffing and Recruitment and Audit, to consider and review. As such, the work undertaken in progressing this theme has perhaps had less exposure to consideration by the full Board and it is, therefore, felt appropriate that the series of updates on Corporate Plan themes starts here in order to redress this balance.

4.   This paper looks at our work under each of the major elements of themes in turn.

Open & inclusive, engaging with the public

5.   Being, and being seen to be, an organisation that is very open with and to the public has been a key aspiration for the Park Authority since day one. This is a matter of both internal culture and process and external communications.

External communications

6.   Our Communications Strategy sets out four principles that should underpin our communication - openness, clarity, pro-activity, and responsiveness. The strategy identified 4 target audiences - local people; opinion formers; the people of Scotland; and visitors and potential visitors to the area. In each case, our objective has been to keep these audiences informed about our work through our programme of communications activity.

7.   As with many of our activities, raising understanding of the Park as well as the role and purpose of the Cairngorms National Park Authority is a substantial and long-term task. It will take some time for people to see the difference that the establishment of a National Park can make to their lives or to their work.

8.   Below we report on our efforts to communicate with the first three of these audiences. Communication with visitors will be addressed in a future report to the Board on progress under theme 1.

Audience 1: local people

Principal communications tools used
9.   Media - regular press releases and articles in local newspapers, and a monthly column by Andrew Thin in the Badenoch and Strathspey Herald
        Publications - Park Life is issued three times a year and distributed to every household in the Park and some just outside the boundary.
        Open meetings - board members are available to local communities at open evenings prior to board meetings every month.
        Local plan consultation - the questionnaire and community profiles were issued to every house in the Park and meetings were held in every community.

Commentary
10.   We have made considerable efforts to communicate with and listen to the people who live and work in the Park over the next 12 months, some of which have been successful and others less so. Communication is an ongoing process, and continued efforts will be needed to build trust and understanding. In the next year, we propose to add the following elements to our programme:
        • A presence at summer events in every community in the Park

Audience 2: Scottish public

Principal communications tools used
11.   Media – effort has been made to win coverage for the Park in the Scottish press through press releases and interviews.

Commentary

12.   As for other bodies in the North of Scotland, it has proved to be difficult to get our message across through the national media. Though there have been some successes, we need to do more to raise awareness of the Park among the Scottish public. A couple of measures are planned:

- The difficulty of getting 'studio quality' interviews in remote areas can inhibit radio coverage, so we are installing an ISDN interview facility in the Grantown office
- Next year, we intend to target more specialist publications with features – articles of a more general and discursive nature – in addition to press releases. Funds have been allocate to this in the next financial year.

Audience 3: stakeholders and opinion formers

Principal communication tools used

13.   Media – winning media coverage is important to communicating our message to this audience
Events – CNPA speakers have addressed events for a number sectors over the last 12 months, including land managers and the tourism industry. The CNPA held an open evening for MSPs in Edinburgh in February
Direct contact – there is a high level of direct contact with this audience through our day-to-day work programme, including the new Advisory Forums

Commentary

14.   There is no doubt that considerable progress has been made in communicating with this audience. Inevitably, much of this has been on an individual level and so more needs to be done (for example) to ensure that understanding of the role and impact of the Park is spread throughout partner organisations. Additional elements next year will include:

- Repeating the MSPs event in Edinburgh – with a broader invitation list
- Taking stands at the party conferences from September this year
- Detailed consultation with partners on the National Park Plan

Evaluating our communications

15.   This theme is partly about our reputation, and so our success or failure in achieving it can partly be measured by understanding the perceptions and views that people, locally and nationally, have of the Park and the Park Authority. We have appointed Scotinform, a public opinion polling company, to undertake a benchmark opinion polling exercise.

16.   This will measure perceptions of the Park and the work of the Park Authority among local people, the Scottish public, and opinion formers. A full report will be presented to the board in the summer, once the work is complete.

Freedom of Information

17.   Our attitude of openness to stakeholders and the public is complemented by the changing regulatory environment in which we operate, with the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act from 1 January 2005 and the adoption of the Authority's Code of Conduct approved by the Standards Commission for Scotland. Guidance has been developed for staff and Board members on how we should make the most of the opportunity provided by Freedom of Information legislation. Our response to information requests will be under review throughout the coming year and reported to the Audit Committee.

Internal Communications

18.   As the organisation grows and becomes more complex, it is ever more important to have open and effective internal communications. A number of improvements have been made in the last few months. In addition to progressing formation of a Staff Consultative Forum and publication of the Staff Handbook (see below), notes of management team meetings are now made available for all staff and to facilitate staff briefing by Heads of Group at team meetings.   We are also progressing development of an Authority intranet and file management system, to make access to information and documents more user friendly throughout the organisation.

19.   In highlighting above the amount of "development" work which has gone on over the last year, it is clear that future activity in achieving the strategic objective set in the theme over the three years will require implementation of a number of new structures and processes, with ongoing review of their effectiveness.

Professionalism and integrity

Developing the organisation

20.   The organisation has grown significantly both in terms scale of activity and staff numbers in 2004/05. A large number of staff with a variety of expectations and previous experience have come together in a very short time. This wide range of experience is of huge benefit in our effort to build a new sort of organisation that is able to learn lessons from public and private sectors.

21.   There has, therefore, been a need to establish organisational structure – not so much in terms of arrangement of line management, but in terms of establishing uniformity of procedure and operations. Key actions which have sought to address this over the last year are:

a. Completion of recruitment of Corporate Services staff – Head of Group, Human Resources Manager, IT Support Officer and Finance Manager have all been recruited in the summer and autumn of 2004.
b. Roll-out of the CNPA Staff Handbook, completed in December 2004.
c. Implementation of a system of job evaluation and consequent application of that system to identify staff salary grades within a uniform salary structure.
d. Development of a draft staff performance review and target setting process.
e. Development of a remit for a Staff Consultative Forum for the Authority, to enhance two-way information flows through the organisation, integration of the staff group beyond the formal Groups set out in organisational structure and facilitate future processes of consultation and negotiation.
f. Development of revised recruitment procedures to support goals of establishing a professional organisation and support development of the existing staff group.

22. Much of the activity outlined above has been the subject of reports to the Board's Staffing and Recruitment Committee or developed following discussion between officers and members of the Committee.

Developing the culture

23. In seeking to further develop the organisational culture in line with this theme, we have undertaken two staff away days and a number of training sessions. However, building a culture that is in line with our values is a long-term task. There are many elements to this, which crucially need to be managed as an integrated project with a clear goal. It will encompass various elements as set out below, but broadly includes implementation of HR systems, internal communication and control systems, and a full programme of training to ensure that everyone in the organisation has a baseline of skills. Importantly, the project is about everyone in the organisation recognising the challenge involved in managing change, and playing their part in it. New organisations don't just happen - they need to be built.

24. We plan to establish a project steering group drawn from members of the Board, staff representatives and external representatives, together with the Chief Executive and ourselves. This steering group will advise on the development of the organisation, and act as a project board reviewing delivery of the strategic objectives. It is expected that the steering group would have a fixed life of around two years.

25. Key aspects of our work plan for developing the organisational culture are highlighted below.

Staff development

26.   The performance appraisal process to be implemented early in 2005/06 is central to the process of developing staff and managing performance within a framework of corporate and operational plans and of targeted stakeholder collaboration.

27.   The draft appraisal process combines elements of performance review over the previous year with the identification of priority tasks and objectives for the coming year. This will form a key means of establishing clarity of purpose and priority for staff, in line with the objectives set out in our corporate and operational plans.

28.   A performance review process also gives an opportunity to review past performance and identify staff development appropriate to the individual and the organisation. Training and development plans will be compiled centrally from the outcome of staff appraisals.   Training plans will also include corporate developments where there is an identified need for all staff to undertake activity in specific areas - for example in establishing a baseline for IT skills, or training all staff in participating in appraisals.

Retention and reward

29.   Our recruitment policy seeks to encourage and support the development of the Authority and its staff. In developing a professional organisation, recruitment practice will be complemented by structured training and development plans and clear work objectives.

30.   Retention of staff is also an important factor in maintaining the organisation's skill and knowledge base and also to maximise the benefits of staff development programmes. We intend to review the Authority's existing conditions to consider areas where improvements could be made to support staff retention.

31.   The implementation of an appraisal system early in 2005/06 will also establish a basis from which a system of performance related pay (PRP) may be implemented. The Scottish Executive expect a PRP system to be implemented in time to be included in pay awards for 2006/07.   There are a wide range of potential systems which may be implemented and this will involve a process of consultation with staff and Board members through the coming year.

32.   With guidance on Promoting Disability Equality forthcoming in the next year, we also intend to review our present Staff Handbook against draft guidance to identify any areas where the Authority's procedures may be improved. This again will help shape the content of future work to promote equality through development of specific guidance and/or revision of existing procedures.

Innovation

33.   To be an innovative organisation means having a culture which is conscious of, and supports, taking risks and which manages those risks.

Risk management

34.   Risk management should not be viewed as necessarily equating to risk reduction or risk avoidance. Every organisation should identify risks associated with its operations; to determine its appetite for taking-on or accepting those risks and to identify where additional action may be required to ensure delivery of targets. To this end, the Management Team and Chair of the Audit Committee took part in a risk management workshop facilitated by Deloitte, the Authority's internal auditors.

35.   As a result, we have put in place a register of key risks that may affect achievement of strategic objectives over the next 3 years. The Audit Committee will consider a draft risk management strategy for the Authority when it next meets at the end of March. This strategy should support innovation through identification and evaluation of risks associated with taking original actions. Once finalised, we will work to embed the risk management strategy within the organisation and to highlight the benefits of using these risk management principles in our work, including project management and grant assessment.

Efficient Government

36.   We will be seeking means of participating in a meaningful way with the Scottish Executive's Efficient Government Initiative. As a relatively small organisation, our participation will often depend on seeking appropriate areas for collaboration with other organisations. This may involve building on existing NDPB working groups, such as those on Staff Development, Property/Facilities Management, Specialist Services and IT to which we already contribute.

37.   We will also seek to engage with the Business Improvement Project being established in the Highlands area and funded by the Scottish Executive's Efficient Government Fund.

Health and safety

38.   We must also have regard to Health and Safety issues within the Authority. Early in 2005/06 we will assess our operations in order to put in place an action plan for addressing Health and Safety issues in the organisation and identify any specific resource requirements.

39.   This work will include a review of work/life balance of staff, with a stress audit to be undertaken in the coming year. Results of this activity will help focus our work in Human Resource areas in the next three years.

Technology and Environment

40.   In the spirit of innovation, we are reviewing how technology can help to improve the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of the organisation while undertaking our activities with high environmental standards.

41.   In the past few months, we have begun to use telephone conference facilities to improve communications between our office bases in Grantown and Ballater. This facility potentially reduces the number of journeys made by staff between offices. We are also planning to upgrade the line between these offices to improve data transfer and network communications, and to upgrade servers, allowing some division of network support and a reduction in compete network "down-time". We are also planning an upgrade to our operating and security software in order to improve access to email from outside our offices. The introduction of an Authority intranet – incorporating more user-friendly access to electronic files and information for staff – is planned for next year.

42.   In 2004/05, we undertook a "Green Audit" on the environmental impact of the Authority's operations. We will consider the results of this and draw up an action plan to reduce this impact over the course of the next few years.

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